Steps to Success: Communicating with Your Child’s School

By CADRE (The National Center for Dispute Resolution in Special Education, www.cadreworks.org)

If you have a child who is receiving special education services, you’re more than likely to be very involved with your child’s school and teachers — including planning, reviewing, and assessing your child’s educational program. Over time, you will learn a lot about the special education process and how to communicate and negotiate on your child’s behalf. While your knowledge, skill, and confidence will naturally increase, there are some specific communication skills that can help you be most successful in developing and maintaining a strong partnership with your child’s school. We hope these “Steps to Success” will be particularly helpful to parents who are new to the special education process.

Getting Started - First, understand that your role as a parent is unique. No one knows and loves your child the way that you do. You are the expert on your child. And, while you may not have all the answers, you want your child to be successful in school and in life. Your passion, as a parent, can help you communicate brilliantly, and sometimes, it can overtake you.

Step 1 - Be mindful of your emotional pressure gauge as you work with your child’s school. If you expect to have difficulty when meeting with school personnel, your mind and body will be primed for battle. How can you communicate successfully if you are on the verge of overflowing in anguish and outrage? Don’t let your mind go there. Keep thoughts of past (or present) problems at school, worst fears, and other negatives from creeping into your mind. Focus positively on your goals and the view that the school wants to do their best for your child. Keep telling yourself that you and your child will succeed.

Step 2 - Prioritize and plan. What’s the most important thing that needs to be accomplished for your child? Make a list of the issues, questions, and possible solutions. Rank them. Decide if there are any you can pass on and which one(s) must be addressed. Plan how you are willing to give and take in order to achieve the higher goal. Map out what you need to say and practice, if that helps:

“Let’s try this for 8 weeks and see how it goes. ”

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“Here’s a recommendation from...that has proven successful for other students. We should seriously consider this for Janey.”

Step 3 - Actively listen to understand the other person’s perspective. If you don’t understand what someone is saying, tell him or her. Be direct:

“I just don’t understand what you are saying. Can you explain it in a different way or give me some examples?”

“Is there something you can show me, in writing, so I can fully understand?”

Keep asking and wait for responses until you do fully understand. Resist any temptation to answer your own questions or put words into someone else’s mouth.

Step 4 - Clarify your statements if you see a puzzled expression on someone’s face and ask for clarification in return. Paraphrase, or restate so that you and others are clear in your understanding. To be understood:

“I must not be explaining this clearly, what I’m trying to say is...”

“Here’s a copy of... Let’s look at this together. It shows that...”

So that you understand:

“It sounds like you’re saying...”

“If I understand you correctly, you’re saying... Is that right?”

“Is that written down anywhere so I can read it?”

Often, the process of clarifying one’s understanding provides an opportunity to clear up a misconception or correct misinformation that could be critical to finding a satisfactory solution for your child. So, don’t overlook the value of this technique.

Step 5 - Have options in mind and offer them for discussion, as needed. As a parent, you’re in a good position to present alternative solutions that might not occur to those who work for the school system.

For example:

“Let’s do some brainstorming on possibilities and see what we can come up with. How about...?”

And, if you’ve done some research, information gathering, or obtained any formal recommendations:

“Here’s a recommendation from...that has proven successful for other students. We should seriously consider this for Janey.”

“Let’s try this for 8 weeks and see how it goes.”

It’s also important to make sure that the focus stays on your child and meeting his or her needs. Sometimes, words like the following can help tighten everyone’s focus:

“Jordan’s dad and I just haven’t seen the kind of progress that Jordan needs to make. What other options can we consider for him?”

Step 6 - You’re only human. If someone has been particularly helpful, acknowledge their efforts. Sometimes, especially when frustrations rise, acknowledging what has gone well, and how hard everyone has worked, sweetens the air a bit and makes it possible for everyone to feel better and push towards the finish line! If, by chance, you make a mistake, or cause offense, say you’re sorry. Making an apology says that you’re only human and helps to humanize what is often a formal process and sends the message that you can be forgiving of others’ mistakes. “Please and thank you’ also go a long way in keeping conversations civil, and not surprisingly, helps everyone say “yes.”
## Calendar of Events

For more information or to register for any of these events, please call us at (415) 920-5040 or visit us at [www.supportfamilies.org](http://www.supportfamilies.org).

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<tr>
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<td>PPW - Assessments Demystified</td>
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<td>PM - Parent to Parent (English)</td>
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<td>WS - Identify &amp; Support Issues w/ Reading Pt. 1</td>
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<td>Teen Triple P - Spanish</td>
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<td>WS= Workshop</td>
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### Workshops and Clinics

- **Educational Workshops and Clinics**
  - Learn about resources, rights, and responsibilities in monthly parent/ professional workshops and weekly small-group clinics. Care giving for children and interpretation services are available with advance reservation for clinics and workshops.

### Workshops

- **Parenting with Confidence**
  - Saturday, October 12, 8:30 AM - 12:30 PM
  - If you are at the end of your rope, tired of speaking to a “brick wall” or just seeking to know more about parenting – this workshop is for you! Topics will include communication, quality time, dealing with meltdowns and building the parent-child bond.

- **Screen Time: Realistic Recommendations for Young Children**
  - Thursday, October 17, 6:00 PM - 7:30 PM
  - This presentation will discuss the latest research on screen time and how it impacts the language development and communication skills of young children. The presenter will share useful resources and realistic recommendations for your family.

- **IEP Meetings: Empowering Parents with Effective Strategies**
  - Tuesday, October 22, 6:00 PM - 8:00 PM
  - Learn how to:
    - be persuasive when you’re so upset
    - why you should rely on facts, not emotions or conclusions
    - expand your IEP Team
    - build an IEP block by block

- **Identify and Support Issues with Reading**
  - Tuesday, November 12 & Tuesday, November 19, 6:00 PM - 8:00 PM (two-part series)
  - In both workshops, participants will experience what it’s like to have some common processing issues in reading and understand which skills they impact. They will learn how specific multisensory techniques help to develop the skills that contribute to becoming a successful reader.

- **Clinics**
  - **IEP Clinic**
    - Learn about special education law, the IEP process, what to do when things aren’t working, and how to become a more active and effective team member. Bring your questions and real life issues.
    - Chinese: 1st Thursday, 6:00 PM - 8:00 PM
    - English: 2nd Thursday, 4:00 PM - 6:00 PM
    - Spanish: 3rd Thursday, 4:00 PM - 6:00 PM

### Calendar of Events

- **Transition to Adulthood Clinic**
  - Successfully navigate the transition from school to adulthood. Learn how to navigate special education transition services and how to effectively participate in the development of your child’s transition plan. Appropriate for parents of children ages 12+. 4th Thursday of the month, 4:00 PM - 6:00 PM

- **Parent Mentor Program**
  - **Parent to Parent**
    - Participants will learn about the Parent Mentor Program and receive interactive training on positive listening & communication skills.
    - Parent to Parent (Spanish Part 1 & 2)
      - Wednesday, December 4 and 11, 10:00 AM to 2:00 PM
    - Parent to Parent (English)
      - Saturday, December 14, 8:00 AM to 4:00 PM

If you would like to sign up, please contact the following people:

- **Ahide Palomera (English)**
  - Phone: (415) 282-7494 ext. 138
  - Email: apalomera@supportfamilies.org

- **Olga Maldonado (Spanish)**
  - Phone: (415) 282-7494 ext. 121
  - Email: omaldonado@supportfamilies.org

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For more information or to register for any of these events, please call us at (415) 920-5040 or visit us at [www.supportfamilies.org](http://www.supportfamilies.org).

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1663 Mission Street, Suite 700, San Francisco, CA 94103 • (415) 282-7494 • info@supportfamilies.org • www.supportfamilies.org
Support Groups & Parent Child Interactive Groups

Support groups are FREE and held at Support for Families unless otherwise indicated. Childcare can be provided unless otherwise indicated but MUST be reserved in advance. If you are interested in participating in any of these groups, or if you are interested in a specific issue, call (415) 920-5040 or e-mail info@supportforfamilies.org for more information. We have staff who speak English, Spanish and Cantonese. Come to a support group to find solutions to challenges, learn advocacy skills and explore resources. Support groups provide a network for families to gain strength by sharing experiences with peers.

PARENT SUPPORT GROUPS

Autism Parent Group
Meets 4th Tuesday of the month
6:30 PM - 8:15 PM
*This group will not meet October 22, 2019

Cantonese-Speaking Parents Support Group
Meets 2nd Saturday of the month
1:00 PM - 3:00 PM

ChinaTown Child Development Center (CCDC) Group
For Cantonese-speaking families of children with special needs. Meets at the CCDC on the 3rd Monday of the month, 9:30 AM - 12:00 PM

Families of Adults with Disabilities
Addressing adult services issues including transition.
Meets 1st & 3rd Mondays, 6:30 PM - 8:30 PM

Prader-Willi Group
Meets quarterly on Saturdays. Next date TBD.

Spanish-Speaking Parent Support Group
Meets 2nd Wednesday of the month
10:00 AM - 12:00 PM

Parents of Transition Age Youth
Meets 1st Tuesday of the month, 6:30 PM - 8:15 PM.

Tuesday Night Group *New Hours*
A group for parents of young children with disabilities or special health care needs.
Meets 1st Tuesday of the month from 6:45 PM - 8:30 PM and 4th Tuesday of the month, 5:00 PM - 6:30 PM

UCSF Inpatient Parent Support Group
Meets every Thursday, 1:00 PM - 2:00 PM

GROUPS FOR YOUTH

Conversation & Social Club for Transition & Young Adult AAC Users
Meets at the Noe Valley Public Library Meeting Room every Monday, 4:30 PM - 5:30 PM

Parent Child Interactive Groups

Deaf/HH Baby Class
This group specializes in working with children who are deaf and hard of hearing. Birth to 3 years old.
First Monday of the month, 9:30 AM - 10:30 AM

Abriendo Puertas
Meets Thursday, 8:00 AM - 10:30 AM at George Moscone Elementary School. Abriendo Puertas is a 10-session program available in Spanish and English, that promotes school readiness, family well-being, and parent advocacy. Call Olga Maldonado at 415-920-5040, ext. 121 for more information.

Volunteer Opportunities
Volunteers are extremely important to the work we do. We could not offer our huge range of programs, events and workshops without our treasured volunteers.

We are currently seeking volunteer photographers to assist us in documenting our events, conferences and fund raisers. Please contact Rachel Klegon, the Special Events and Volunteer Manager, at rklegon@supportforfamilies.org if you are interested in volunteering with us or call her directly at (415) 282-7494, ext. 126.

Group Volunteer Opportunities
We welcome the opportunity to work with groups and corporations. If you are interested in learning more or connecting with us please email Rachel Klegon at rklegon@supportforfamilies.org.

Special Family Events & Volunteer Opportunities

Special Family Events
Special Family Events and activities provide opportunities for families of children with special health care needs and disabilities to experience new activities in a stress-free, accepting space.

The supported environment is welcoming and encourages families to connect their children to the community and try something new. Check out our special events below for more information and dates.

Save the date for these upcoming events:

Movie Night at Support for Families featuring Pixar Animation Studio’s Inside Out
Friday, November 8, 6:00 PM to 8:00 PM
Registration opens Thursday, October 10 at 10:00 AM.

Family Access Day at Children’s Creativity Museum
Saturday, November 16, 9:00 AM - 12:00 PM
Registration opens Thursday, October 17 at 10:00 AM.

Ice Skating Party at Yerba Buena Center,
Saturday, December 7, 6:00 PM - 8:00 PM
Registration opens Thursday, November 7 at 10:00 AM.

Information and Resource Conference 2020
Saturday, March 21, 2020, 8:30 AM - 3:30 PM at John O’Connell High School. Registration opens Tuesday, February 18 at 9:30 AM.

Call (415) 920-5040 to register for any of these events. Space is limited and on a first come, first served basis. You can also visit our website at www.supportforfamilies.org.
All services are free of charge:
- Phone Line & Drop-In Center
- Information & Resources
- Resource Library
- Support Groups
- Parent Mentor Program
- Educational Workshops
- Special Family Events
- Short-Term Counseling
- Community Outreach
- Parent-Child Interactive Groups
- Website: www.supportforfamilies.org

This newsletter is published quarterly in English, Spanish & Chinese. If you have a question or comment, email info@supportforfamilies.org

Support for Families
1663 Mission Street, Suite 700
San Francisco, CA 94103
T: (415) 282-7494
F: (415) 282-1226

Family Resource Center Warmline, Information and Referral
1663 Mission Street, Suite 700
San Francisco, CA 94103
T: (415) 920-5040

Mission Statement
The purpose of Support for Families is to ensure that families of children with any kind of disability or special health care need, and the providers who serve them, have the knowledge and support to make informed choices that enhance children’s development and well-being. We promote partnership with families, professionals and the community at large, because it is through partnership that we create a community where our children can flourish.

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How You Can Help - Donate
All services and events, even childcare, are always free of charge to encourage participation by all families. With the demand for services greater than ever, your donations help make this possible. A gift to Support for Families means that families of children with special needs will be better prepared to help their children—and that more children with disabilities will live their lives with dignity and opportunity.

Send a check to our address or give online at http://bit.ly/donatesfcd. Every gift can help make a difference in the life of a child with special needs.

Support for Families strives to present families and professionals with a wide range of views and options in its materials and trainings.

The materials and trainings are not necessarily comprehensive, are not meant to be exhaustive, nor are they an endorsement of the author and/or presenter.

If you would like to offer feedback or if you know of additional resources, speakers and/or materials that may be helpful, please contact us at info@supportforfamilies.org.