

Can We Talk? School meetings can be a drag — but they don't have to be. Whether you are going to your child's school for good news or for news that is not so good, there are things you can do to make this less stressful and more productive. The goal is to keep communication open with school staff and to work together to solve problems and share successes. Sometimes you will agree with the staff, sometimes you may have different opinions. It's important to work as a team, each of you supporting the other, and both of you supporting your child.

Model the Behavior You Desire in Others. When possible, invite your child to attend these meetings with you. This can be positive on several levels. Your child can see how YOU listen and share your concerns to resolve issues. You can see how the teacher and your child get along with each other; hopefully that will be mutually respectful. And somehow, when a child or youth is present, we are less likely to argue with each other.

BEFORE THE MEETING

Be Prepared. Make a list of questions or issues you want to discuss. Prioritize the list so you can concentrate on the issues that are most important to you. If possible, send a copy to the teacher ahead of time so he/she will have time to prepare. Ask for a list of those who will be attending the meeting besides the teacher. Ask the teacher if there are issues he/she wants to address so you can be prepared as well. Have an honest discussion with your child so you are both "in the know" about why there is a meeting. Let your child know that it is better to share with you before the meeting as opposed to being surprised during the meeting.

What to Wear? Ah, those first impressions! All meetings at school are important. Wear what you would if guest were coming to your home. You are representing your child and your family.

School is a time for learning and making friends

- **PROGRESS** - How is your child doing in these academic and social areas?
- **PROBLEMS** - Is there a student who causes problems for your child? Does the teacher know about this and, if so, what is she/he doing about it? What can your child do about it?
- **SOLUTIONS** – Do you or your child have any suggestions to make things go more smoothly?

Supporting Student Success

First, ask your child how he/she is doing at school? Ask if changes need to be made.

STUDENT PERFORMANCE. Does your child need extra support in order to learn? Some school testing provides information about learning styles, that is, the best way a student learns. For instance, some students can hear a lesson and get it right away, but others need to hear it and write it down, and some have to say it and write it, too. Review with the teacher any recent test results to ensure that your child's learning style is being met.

SEATING. Some students learn best by sitting near the chalkboard, some need to be separated from friends or others, some like more space, some need to avoid being by the windows (allergies or noises), and some do not like to sit near the classroom door due to hallway noise.

TESTING and ASSIGNMENTS. Is your child having problems finishing the schoolwork? Would having more time or less work help them? Is tutoring available?

BEFORE THE MEETING

Health Issues — Wellness & School Performance

Students learn best when they are feeling well.

MEDICAL ISSUES AT SCHOOL. Have you shared a list of medications and important contact numbers with key school staff? Does your child know these, have a copy and carry the information? Can the medication schedule be slightly changed so it does not interfere with the class schedule? Is there a Nurse at the school? What is the plan to handle medical emergencies?

STAMINA — ENERGY FOR THE DAY. Has the class schedule and classroom location been organized so that there is no running back and forth? Does the student have access to easy entries, shortcuts, and elevators? Think about having two sets of schoolbooks—one for home and one for school.

PERSONAL AIDES & THERAPIES. Do your child's PT, OT or Speech schedules interfere with his/her classes? Does your child need a helper? Is there one assigned?

BEFORE THE MEETING

Skills For Transition

It takes time to learn and practice the skills to be as independent as possible. How is the school helping to prepare your child? How much can your child do without help? In areas where your child needs help, has he/she learned how to direct others to help?

At the age of 14 (earlier in some states), schools are required to develop an **Individualized Transition Plan (ITP)** that includes activities and skills needed for independent living, increased mobility in the community, and on-site work skills that could lead to employment. Health needs are rarely included in these plans, but they should be as they affect timing, stamina, scheduling, etc.

DAY OF MEETING

Breathe - Relax. Try to avoid dashing from work or home chores. Bring paper and pen to take notes. Divide the paper in two columns — Positive Comments and Concerns. Write down the thoughts you want to share. Before you leave to get to the school, sit down and take a break — 10 minutes will make all the difference in keeping your cool and staying on track with your good intentions.

Arrive Early and SMILE! Plan for the unexpected, such as traffic jams or time to find a parking space. Enter the building 10 minutes before your scheduled time. This gives you a chance to review your notes and see what's happening in the school. **SMILE and SAY HELLO.** If there is a long table where you are meeting, sit at the head of it; yes, that is the "in charge" spot. Where you sit, how you talk, what you do, and how you do it all matter.

Friendly Tones. It's okay to be a little nervous at these meetings. Teachers get nervous, too. The more the two of you talk to each other, the easier it will be. Even if this meeting is "bad news," work hard at not getting angry. Sometimes it helps when we talk less and listen more. Compliment those persons who have made an effort to help your child achieve success. Everyone needs to be reminded that you are all one team working for the best interests of your child. What does work: when adults can talk and discuss honestly what the issues are, share ideas, and be open to try new ones. What does not work: when one person is angry and bossy. That can make the other person defensive and less apt to listen. **REMINDER:** We are all here in the best interest of the student.

DAY OF MEETING (con't.)

Stay Focused & Respectful of Time. Right at the beginning, ask how much time is scheduled for the meeting. Do not exceed that time unless the folks at school can take more time. Keep in mind that other families may be waiting. If you need more time, schedule another meeting. People who choose to agree can work quickly. Keep looking for the positive.

You Do Not Agree. Sometimes at the end of a meeting you may not agree. If you are the person who does not agree with the teacher, ask him/her to give you some additional information to help you see his/her opinion. Maybe she/he will need to send you the information later. If the teacher is not agreeing with you, be prepared to say something like this: "It looks as if we are not agreeing about this issue. After our meeting I will send you some information for you to look over and think about." If either of you need time to think over an issue, that's okay.

When people are given enough information to help them think about an issue, they can and often do change their minds.

Keep In Mind, It's Not About YOU. Someone's suggestion may be a new idea to the other person. People tend to think their ideas are right and that makes them feel more in control. Be compassionate; people will have different points of views. If after trying again to resolve the issue and it's not working, ask for a meeting with a supervisor or the principal.

AFTER THE MEETING

The Meeting Went Well! Send a short note thanking the teacher for his/her time. Include in this note something he/she said that you appreciated. If the teacher went out of his/her way, let him/her know what you liked about it. Teachers, like others, need to be recognized for things they do well. Once in awhile, send a note to the Principal letting him/her know what's working.

The Meeting Didn't Go Very Well. Occasionally a meeting will not go the way you wanted it to. Think about it: why was it negative? Was it because of a differing opinion? Was there too much talking and not enough listening or sharing? Did the mood (yours or theirs) start the meeting off the wrong way?

Whatever the reason, think about sending a note thanking the teacher for his/her time.

If you think YOU were the problem, apologize. It takes a big person to do that, and all of us have a bad day now and then.

If the teacher seemed to create more of the conflict, there may have been something that was bothering him/her before you arrived. It may have had nothing to do with you but it was hard to shake it off. Add in your note that you are looking forward to your next meeting,

ACCOMMODATIONS - Health &...Transition Plans

Possible items that may need to be considered when developing an IEP, 504 Plan, and ITP for a student with special health care needs.

Ask your child/youth and teacher about:

1. **Transportation:** transportation safety, climate control, personal assistance, field trips, wheelchair lifts, maximum distance to and from school
2. **Accessibility:** school entrances, doors inside the school building, as well as areas used for school activities, bus trips, and emergency evacuation plans/alternate routes
3. **Related Services:** therapies (speech, OT, PT), nursing and medical services
4. **Activities of Daily Living:** all self-help skills, such as eating, dressing, toileting, and grooming
5. **Class Work & Curriculum:** stamina issues should be considered in developing class schedules, 2nd set of books for those who have difficulty carrying books, use of NCR paper for board work for those with weak fine motor issues, drill work based on % correct to demonstrate mastery not quantity
6. **Support Staff:** teacher's aides, note-takers, interpreters, personal assistants, peer support
7. **Physical Education:** modifications to the regular program, inclusion in extra-curricular activities
8. **Assistive Technology:** adapted keyboards, acquisition and repair of equipment (Medicaid, private insurance, Title V, and school funds)
9. **Medications, Medical Supplies and Equipment:** supervised dosage, specialized toilet, changing table, privacy/discretion of medical information
10. **Emergency Preparedness & Evacuation Plan:** waiting in stuck elevators, medical crisis, weather alerts, communication during crises.
11. **Vocational Training:** skills plus awareness of work setting, environmentally safe/won't conflict with health needs and supports needed to be productive
12. **Transition:** including learning to participate in one's IEP, understanding your own disability/special health needs and required accommodations, developing self-advocacy skills, future planning
13. **Equal Access:** to extra-curricular activities, before-and-after school programs, clubs and sports teams, including needed supports and transportation
14. **School Lunch Program:** includes modifications and substitutions prescribed by the student's doctor, and applies to all students, whether participating in the free or reduced-price lunch program, or paying the standard cost - applies to all students who have "special dietary needs"
15. **Standardized Test Programs:** includes modifications to how the standardized tests are given as well as determination of whether or not alternate evaluation methods will be used instead of standardized testing
16. **Expectations & Aspirations**—what does the student want to do after school, how do his/her interests and skills prepare for that life? Get as close to his/her dream as possible.



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