Preparing for Productive and Effective Conversations with Education and Service Providers

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Here are our top three tips for making every conversation with your child's IFSP or IEP team an opportunity to show them what makes your child the remarkable human being you know and love.

1. SHARE YOUR CHILD'S STRENGTHS AND NEEDS

Every conversation with your child's IFSP or IEP team is an opportunity to show them what makes your child the remarkable human being you know and love. As you work together to develop a plan to address their needs, it's equally important that you share your child's strengths. They are more than the sum of their symptoms, challenges, and disabilities. Your child's interests are a part of who they are and their current abilities can help to identify the best support strategies for their individual needs.

Strengths	Needs
Things my child does that make me feel happy or unconcerned	**Things my child does or cannot do that make me feel concerned**
Smiles back at me or others	Doesn't smile back at me or others
Responds to his or her name	Doesn't respond to his or her name
Likes to play with other children	Prefers to play alone
Makes sounds, babbles, or talks	Seldom attempts to make sounds

*Adapted from **PACER Center**

While it's true that children develop differently, at their own pace, and that the range of what's "normal" development is quite broad, it's hard not to worry and wonder. If you think that your child is not developing at the same pace or in the same way as most children his or her age, it may be helpful to review established guidelines, such as the Early Learning and Development Guidelines. This booklet includes information about what children can do and learn at different stages of development, focused on birth through third grade. **A free downloadable version** is available from the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI).

2. ASK QUESTIONS

No single person knows everything. You are not expected to know or understand every word or acronym used. Parents have the right to ask questions before, during, and after meetings. Although the professionals may know about child development, you are the expert in your child. It is important for you to ask questions for clarification and understanding; learning as much as you can helps you to be a better advocate for your child.

3. TAKE NOTES AND SHARE YOUR REFLECTIONS

Write down your questions before meetings and make note of anything that remains unanswered to follow up on. During the meeting, take notes that highlight concerns, resolutions, and unresolved issues. As soon as possible after the meeting, or at least within the next 24 hours, write down everything you remember from the meeting. Then, email a quick thank you note with your notes attached, asking them to let you know if you misheard or misinterpreted anything that was discussed. This allows for clarification and understanding before frustration can take root and interrupt the team's effectiveness.

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