

Ensuring a Great Start to Kindergarten for Kids with ASD

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It's Transition Time!



- Your child is transitioning to *formal* education.
- Kindergarten is a “sensitive period” that influences the next 12 years of education.
- You are entering a new realm as your child’s advocate.

Today's Topics

1. Parent/Teacher Communication
2. Supporting the Whole Child (behavior)
3. You as the Advocate

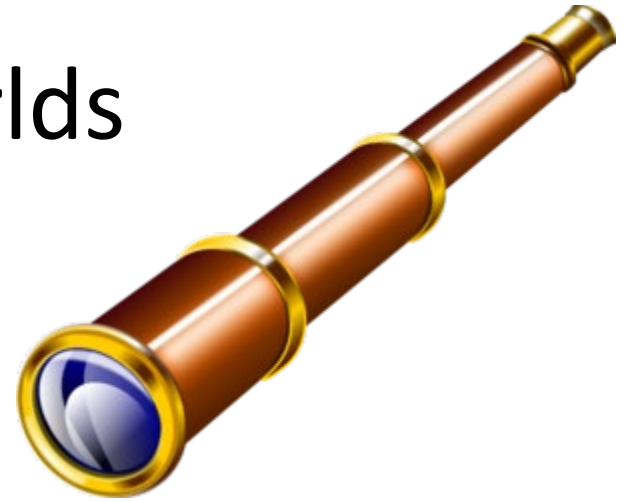
KINDERGARTEN



Understanding Our Worlds

PARENTS

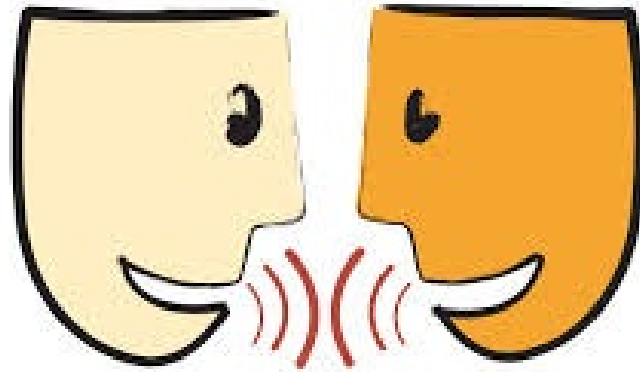
- Parenting **stress** is four times greater for those who have a child with autism as compared to parents of typically developing children.
- Parenting **stress** is twice as great for those with a child with autism as compared to parents of children with other developmental delays.



TEACHERS

- Teachers experience more job-related **stress** than most other professionals.
- Special educators leave the field in greater numbers than general educators because of **stress**.

We need each other.

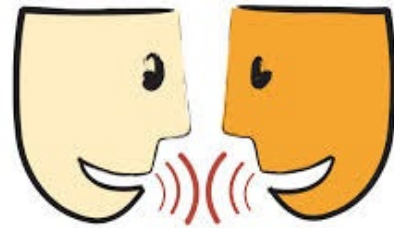


We can understand and support
one another.

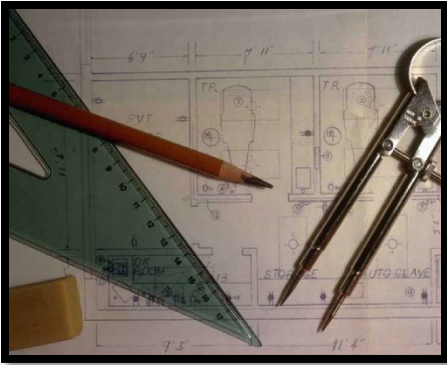
The purpose of the parent/teacher relationship is student success.

- Research shows that student success increases as the collaboration between parent and teacher increases.
- IDEA (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act) mandates the parent/teacher relationship through the IEP team.
- The law and the IEP can parade as THE BIG DEAL.
 - Lawsuits; bringing in the “heavy hitters” for meetings; loss of funding for noncompliance; intense teacher training for writing IEPs...

In our world as a parent and teacher,
good communication is **THE BIG DEAL!**



- Regular parent/teacher communication builds the relationship that supports student success.
- It keeps drama (stress) at a minimum.
- It creates trust as team members.



Planning to Communicate

- Parent/teacher communication is as individual as the child, yet core requisites need to be met.
- The relationship can be built intentionally.
- In this information age, we can tap into multiple communication options.
- *But the best plan is to have a plan.*

Review of Parent/Teacher Communication Methods – **Non-Responsive**

PARENT

- Doesn't pick up when seeing school on caller ID
- Student's backpack contains yesterday's handouts
- Needs several reminders for signatures on important papers

TEACHER

- Is not available for phone conversations
- Does not answer emails from parents
- Is short and evasive when communication connection is made



Review of Parent/Teacher Communication Methods – Unstructured

PARENT

- Writes in communication book “as needed” and not daily
- Takes care of needs as they arise; otherwise, not heard from

TEACHER

- Usually not an initiator.
- Contacts parent when something goes wrong



Review of Parent/Teacher Communication Methods – Plan in Place

PARENT & TEACHER

- Regular (daily or weekly) communication plan in place.
- Method of communication works for both
- Understanding on both parts how to communicate for further clarification (phone, email, text)



Communication Guidelines

PARENT: As an extremely valued team member:

- You know your child best
- Your input gives the team insight
- Your support strengthens your child
- You are your child's strongest advocate

TEACHER: As a pivotal team member:

- You are invested in your students' success
- You are the gateway to the educational world



Best Practices

Daily/Regular Communication

PARENT

- Communicate as if your child was the most important student in the school – he/she is!
- Learn the teacher's mode of daily communication and ask for modifications if current method is not helpful enough
- Remain active and involved in your child's daily school life

TEACHER

- Communicate for a child who can't always speak for him/herself
- Schedule time (and keep it sacred) for preparing regular communication to the parent
- Include endearing information about the child's day
- Communicate vigorously even when the parent is not involved

Best Practices

Exceptional Circumstances

PARENT

- Let the teacher know about new growth and new challenges
- If you wonder if something is worth communicating, it most likely is and will be helpful information

TEACHER

- Call or write a note for the POSITIVE events
- Communicate difficult information by staying with facts and withholding opinion

Best Practices – Conflict Resolution

PARENT

- Communicate for information, not confrontation.
- Consider writing your position on an issue as a way of clarifying your thoughts
- Stay with an issue until it is resolved to your satisfaction
- Take a day to consider alternatives suggested by other team members before accepting or rejecting

TEACHER

- Communicate for information, not confrontation.
- Have data to support your student's abilities
- Rely on the IEP team to help resolve conflicts
- Remind yourself that you are part of a team that is working for the benefit of the student – it's not an "us against them" mentality

Let's Make a Plan

- Two-part process:
 - Parent and teacher complete the *Checklist for Effective Parent/Teacher Communication*
 - Use the checklist to make your *Individualized Communication Plan*
- The parent or the teacher can be the initiator for completing these forms.



The process solidifies
commitment.

- It shows that both parties are involved.
- It's a visual reminder of the commitment to communicate.
- It works from preschool through high school.



Observations



- This communication plan fits any student.
 - “Autism”, “ASD”, or “spectrum” are not included on any of the forms.
- *All* students benefit from effective parent/ teacher communication.
 - For students with ASD, the need for communication doesn’t change.
 - As parents and teachers, we’re just more inspired to make it work.

Supporting the WHOLE Child

Autism is a social/communication disability.

- myth of “behaviors”

Behaviors are simply a response.

- they are also a form of communication

The kindergartner needs support in ALL areas:

- academic
- social
- emotional



Your Child's Teacher MUST Know:



- What is autism?
- Who is *your* child?
- All behavior is communication.
- How to respond to a variety of your child's responses.
- How to promote social/emotional learning.

Habits of Your Child

Let the teacher know:

- your child's triggers and how to accommodate
- your child's routines that may differ from the neuro-typical child.
- strategies that calm your child
- the purpose of your child's actions



Positive Responses, Not Negative Consequences



Classroom practices should support the emotional and social learning of all kindergartners.

- Remember, they are “teachers” and can teach, not punish.
- Routines should be in place to support the child’s day.
 - transitions, routines, expectations
 - grace and repeated practice to learn routines

Addressing Academics

Consider the social/emotional world of the learner:

- confusion, fear, misunderstandings during a lesson can lead to those dreaded “meltdowns”

The teacher can avoid this by

- differentiating instruction
- teaching to the child’s strengths
- moderating academic demands



Your Role as Advocate



A parent's heart drives the strongest advocacy.

- You ARE ready for this.
- No matter how great or needy your child's IEP team is, you're the #1 advocate.
- Accept nothing less than a stellar "sensitive year."
- Oh, and please find a way to refresh yourself, too!

Questions?

