

PFA Tips

Communicating with Your Child's Teacher

Strong communication between you and your child's teacher is one of the most important things you can do in supporting your child's success in school. But effective communication doesn't just happen; it needs to be intentional from both sides.

Who Are You Communicating With?

The first step is understanding who you're communicating with. Depending on your child's needs, this may be their primary teacher, a paraeducator, a BCBA, or a combination of staff. Knowing who you're communicating with matters, because the information you receive can change drastically from one staff member to the next.

I was recently in an IEP meeting where the teacher and BCBA shared that they were seeing little to no improvement in my child's behavior from the beginning of the year. The communication sheets that were coming home every day told a completely different story, showing real, consistent progress. Significant progress, even! Moments like that help find gaps in communication within the team itself. Everyone is busy, each person plays a different role, and each role will see your child's progress a little differently. Sometimes the teacher or BCBA won't see all the small, everyday wins, while the paraprofessional, who is there more consistently in the day-to-day, will! This is exactly why understanding who you're communicating with from the beginning is so important.

Set Clear Expectations for Communication

It's important to recognize that teachers are balancing limited time with the needs of an entire classroom. Because of this, daily communication is often brief and

focused on what feels most relevant in the moment. That's why it can be incredibly helpful to decide what matters most to you. Do you want to hear more about your child's social interactions, academic progress, or behavior throughout the day? Communicating your priorities helps whoever you're communicating with focus their updates and ensures you're receiving information that is most meaningful to you.

Communication is a Two-Way Street

Communication should never be one-sided. Your communication with your child's teacher about what's happening at home is just as important as the teacher's communication about what's going on at school. What happens at home, whether it's a rough morning, a big life change, a change in medication, a great night's sleep, or no sleep at all, can directly impact your child's school day. Sharing that kind of information with your child's teacher helps them better understand your child, manage expectations for the day and respond more appropriately.

It's also important to remember that sharing what's working is just as important as sharing what's not. This also goes for both school and home! This kind of information helps everyone stay on the same page, by implementing what's been shown to work, even if it's not always perfect. It also keeps things consistent between home and school. And that consistency can only help your child. A strong parent-teacher relationship is built on this kind of two-way exchange.



What is the Communication Telling You That Your Child Cannot?

It's also important to remember that children are constantly communicating, even when they aren't using words. Changes in behavior, repeated reactions to specific situations, or school subjects and activities, or even frequently mentioned names in daily communication can offer valuable clues. When you can pinpoint patterns in the communication you're receiving every day, it can help identify triggers. It can also highlight positives like friendships or activities your child enjoys. You may pick up on patterns that your child's teacher hasn't. Again, the teacher has an entire classroom of students and you're focusing on your child and your child only. So, be sure to share and discuss the patterns that you're seeing.

The "Good" with the "Bad"

When it comes to communication from school, balance matters. It's important to understand the challenges your child faces, but hearing only about the difficult moments can feel discouraging. Make it

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known that you also want to hear about the good things, the small wins, the moments of progress, and the daily successes. Knowing how your child is thriving is just as important as knowing where they need support.

No Secrets Just Support

The communication between you and your child's teacher should never be a secret. This is another reason it's so important for the positives to be shared along with the areas where your child needs support. If your child is able to understand, they should be included in both the wins and the challenges. They need to know that everyone, both at home and at school, is rooting for them, not just noticing where they fall short.

Communication should never feel like a running list of complaints, but instead a shared, ongoing effort to help support your child.

Communication Shouldn't End in Elementary School

Just because the daily logs often fade after elementary school doesn't mean the need for communication does. As your child grows, the challenges might change, but the need for collaboration does not.

Even if it looks different, staying in touch still matters. It doesn't necessarily have to be constant, but it still has to be intentional. Perhaps it becomes weekly communication rather than daily. But if you still want daily communication, don't hesitate to ask for that. Again, just setting clear expectations makes a world of difference for everybody on both ends. When expectations are clear and communication is good, your child is being better supported. And at the end of the day, no matter what your child's age, that's always the goal!

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