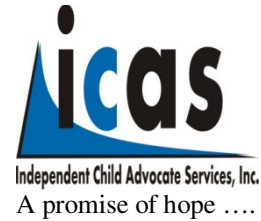




Families Serving Families

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Communication

Communication is a relationship between two or more parties which is 55% speaking and writing and 45% body language, gestures, etc. A good communication relationship can lead to the sharing of attitudes, concerns, ideas, and opinions.

While the basic nature of the business of schools is “to help children,” there are some problems inherent in that business. Financial restraints, human resource restraints, and complex human problems are but a few of these. Because of the variety of issues, it is inevitable that parents and professionals will sometimes disagree with each other. In the communication between parents and professionals regarding these issues, there are several premises on which that communication is based:

- “There will always be differences of opinions about kids.”
- “All Conflicts will eventually be resolved.”
- “Remember, they know that you know.”
- “People are OK, but their behavior may not be.”
- “To win does not mean to take ALL.”

When a problem or concern arises, it is important to communicate it as soon as possible, in order to keep things from getting out of hand. In communicating with professionals about a problem, keep in mind the following points:

- 1) Define the problem clearly – spend time reasoning , defining, and making sure you know what the problem is.
- 2) Contact the KEY person – the biggest mistake parents often make is contacting the wrong person. Contact should be made with the person holding the “key” to the problem.
- 3) Schedule a face-to-face meeting when talking about a problem without being face-to-face, it is easier to one party to “ignore” the other (not really listening to what is being said). A face-to-face meeting is also a way to build the ground work for a good relationship.
- 4) THINK POSITELY!!!

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Once a Meeting to discuss the problem has been arranged, it's important to BE PREPARED for that meeting. Often parents aren't prepared for what they encounter in a meeting with professionals, and as a result, become frustrated and angry with those individuals. Here are some tips for establishing good communication and keeping frustration levels to a minimum during a problem solving meeting with professionals.

- Introduce yourself – put the atmosphere at ease.
- Clearly state your concern – be specific; cite examples. DON'T minimize your problem.
- Maintain eye contact and speak directly to those present.
- Admit your own feeling.
- Listen actively to what everyone has to say.
- Provide deserving “Strokes”.
- Admit mistakes.
- Talk sparingly – consider not talking at times, if appropriate. Stop when your finished.
- Speak positively – use productive humor where appropriate.
- Don't ask questions you already know the answers to – make statements
- Avoid scapegoats and verbal abuse.
- Don't threaten or belittle anyone.
- Be venturesome – accept risk – compromise.
- Take the initiative to “RESTART THE CONVEERSATION.”

Another major component of a good communication relationship is active listening. Listed below are eight rules to good listening which apply, not only to communication with professionals, but to communication in general:

- 1) Do you have the time to listen now? If you don't it's better not to start the conversation.
- 2) Check out the environment – make sure it is conducive to the type of communication that is going to take place.
- 3) Once someone starts to talk, don't interrupt.
- 4) If you don't understand, say so.
- 5) Don't jump to conclusions.
- 6) Hear what is being said – Not “who” is saying it.
- 7) Pay attention to the relationship between the “sender” and “receiver” of the communication.

(Adapted from PDN Presentations by Skip Johnson and James McCormick)

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