

Parents



18 Tips for Communicating with Professionals

Helping Families Succeed!

The Family First Council is dedicated to strengthening the Medina County community by coordinating and supporting health, human, and social services.

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As a parent, you are responsible for your children's well being. One of your primary jobs is to coordinate the services of all different professionals who play a role in your children's lives.

These days, most children come into regular contact with at least two or three of the following professionals:

Health Care Professionals
Child Care Workers
Teachers

Counselors
Coaches
Case Workers

Children with special needs may be dealing with several professionals on a regular basis.

You know your children best-what they are like, the services they are receiving and their special needs.

It's up to you to make sure that all of the professionals who come into contact with your children are **working together with you**.

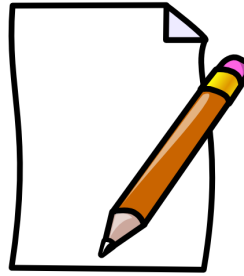
Think of yourself as the coach of a team. If all of your players go in different directions, no matter how good each player may be, they will never get to the goal line. It is the coach's job to get everyone to understand and follow the game plan. The coach helps the players make the most of their individual strengths and uses the combined power of the team to assure victory.

Here are some tips on how to communicate with your children's team of professionals more effectively so that you can get the best results for your children.

1. “Here’s a list of the questions I’d like to discuss with you today.”

Be as clear as possible.

Before an appointment, make notes to yourself of things you want to discuss with the professional. Bring the list with you. Be specific and use examples whenever you can. Many people forget what they want to say when they are nervous. A list will help you remember. Write down the answers as you get them. You may not be able to remember everything later.



2. “Let’s solve this problem so we can figure out the best plan of action.”



You and the professional are partners in working out your child’s problems.

You can both help your child best if you work together as a team.

3. “Let’s share our information so that we can come up with the best solution”

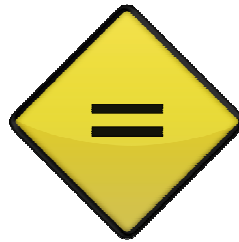


You know your child better than anyone else.

Don’t be intimidated by professionals. They may know more than you about their profession, but you know your child best. You each have special knowledge that can help your child.

4. “I don’t feel you’re treating me as an equal.”

You have a right to be treated with courtesy and respect! You also have the responsibility to treat others the same.



Everyone responds better when treated respectfully. You, the parent, know the most about your child and are an equal partner in the process.



5. “I don’t understand those terms. Could you explain them to me?”

Ask the professional to explain things to you in “plain English” if you don’t

understand the terms being used.

Sometimes professionals talk in their own “language” and use words that only people in their field understand. Don’t be embarrassed to ask for an explanation. You have the right to know exactly what they are saying. After all, it’s your child they are talking about.

6. “I still don’t understand why you think that.”

If you don’t understand how the professional came to a conclusion, ask for the specific reasons behind it.



A recommendation will always make more sense if you clearly see what led to it. Continue to ask questions until you understand the professional’s thinking.

7. “In many cases, that might be the right approach, but I don’t think it would work for my child because...”



You may disagree with professionals about their recommendation for your child.

Don’t be afraid to say so. Professionals are only human. Sometimes they are mistaken. You know your child in a way they can’t. A professional may change their recommendations based on your input.

8. “I’m too upset to continue right now!”

Explain your point of view in a calm, courteous way.



Don’t attack the professional just because you don’t agree. If you are calm rather than angry when expressing your opinion, the professional will be much more likely to see you as a partner who has a different point of view rather than as a “difficult person.” Professionals are really trying to help your child. It’s okay to disagree, to express emotion, cry or be angry; but, if you are feeling “out of control,” it may be better to end early and schedule another meeting.



9. “I’m glad we are on time so we can get as much done as possible.”

Parents and professionals should respect each other’s time.

Like you, professionals can get very busy. That’s why it’s so important to make an appointment-to ensure that you both have enough time to meet and thoroughly discuss any problems. Then try to be on time; if either of you is late to a meeting, it may make both late for the rest of the day.

10. “I think we need to discuss this more. Can we find another time to get together?”



If you need more time with the professional, say so.

If one appointment isn’t long enough to get all your questions answered, the professional should be willing to schedule more time to meet with you. You are entitled to this. It may mean having to set another meeting on another day, but you have a right to get complete, clear information about your child.

11. “When would it be useful for us to visit again?”

Keep in regular contact with any professional involved with your child.

In some instances, it’s important to see a professional on a regular basis if you are going to get the best for your child. Check with professionals to see how often they recommend you contact them.



12. “My child had his last shot in January.”

Find a safe place to keep all of your child’s important records.

Professionals often need to know your child’s history so they don’t do things over again. Keep all of these records in a box or file to help you remember what services your child received, from whom, and when.

13. “Have you talked to my child’s doctor to make sure what you are suggesting is okay?”

Encourage members of your child’s professional team to talk to one another. You may need to sign a form giving permission for professionals to talk with one another on your child’s behalf.

Remember, professionals who work on behalf of your child will perform better if they are working as a team rather than all alone. Part of your job as the “coach” of your child’s team is to make sure the “players” are communicating.



14. “Thanks for all your help; it’s really made a difference for my family.”

If you are pleased with a professional, say so.



Just like everyone else, professionals like to know when they are doing a good job. A simple “thank you” can mean a lot and will go a long way towards guaranteeing that they continue to do the best job for you.

15. “Here is a list of my concerns to share with you.”



Always put your requests and concerns in writing.

Your concerns are important, and to share those concerns and expectations is critical. When placed in writing, miscommunication can be avoided and clear expectations can be set for the issue to be addressed.

16. “Who do I need to talk to next about this?”



If you can’t work out things with a professional directly, you may need to discuss your concerns with a supervisor.

Make sure you’ve made every effort to resolve things with the professional before you see a supervisor. Be sure to follow the “chain of command.”



17. “I don’t think this is working. Can you suggest someone else who might be able to help me?”

If you have tried all of the above and still cannot get along with the professional, think about changing to a different person.

Sometimes people simply cannot get along. If you have done the best you can and still do not feel comfortable with a professional, you’ll be better off finding someone else to help your family.

18. “I believe this is what we discussed and agreed to at our last meeting.”

Following a meeting, document your thoughts and send a copy to each person who was present at the meeting.

To achieve the goals and objectives, to take the next steps, or if you are not sure you are in agreement, your communication concerning the meeting can make a difference. Briefly outline your interpretation of the meeting and ask for a response to your letter so that at the next meeting, everyone has a clear understanding of what has transpired and how to continue.

