Easter Seals – April 9th 2016

Working Together: Effective Advocacy & Collaboration

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Gimme a "T"... Gimme an "E"... Gimme an "A"... Gimme an "M". What does it spell? "TEAM" LOUDER... TEAM... LOUDER TEAM!

Mr. & Mrs. Donahoe have been real active parents on the team.

Parents as Partners
“The evidence is clear that parental encouragement, activities and interest at home and parental participation in schools and classrooms positively influence achievement, even after the student’s ability and family socio-economic status are taken into account.”

Source: Getting Started, Ministry of Education and Training
Successful parent-professional partnerships result in improved outcomes for students, but many parents and professionals require training to develop the skills necessary to form effective relationships.

Source: *Teaching Exceptional Children*, Mar 2007
“When parents are involved, children do better in schools, and they go to better schools.”

Source: Swap, 1993
Communication is Key

A culture of collaboration...

And a positive school climate can help professionals, parents, guardians, and educators work constructively together to address concerns related to programs and services before they become a source of conflict.
Promoting a Positive School Climate

- Everyone is treated with respect
- The school is a caring and responsive one
- Educators encourage and maintain regular interaction between the school and families
- The school culture develops a sense of community and caring relationships to provide all students with greater opportunities for success
- Parents are involved in school activities
- Everyone feels safe and secure
Benefits of Building Positive Relationships

- Positive relationships = creative solutions
- Everyone understands they have a role to play to ensure the best interests of the student are met
- Willingness to consider solutions other than the way things have been done before
- Students can sense the quality of the relationship between parents and educators
Effective Communication

- A positive school climate is based and strengthened by effective communication. Effective communication provides a foundation for preventing and resolving conflicts in a friendly, informal way.

- Educators and Parents share a common goal to provide the best possible educational opportunity for the student. However, each views the situation from a different perspective. For effective communication, it is essential to understand and acknowledge the other’s perspective.
## Effective Communication (Cont’d)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PARENT PERSPECTIVE</th>
<th>TEACHER PERSPECTIVE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Acknowledgement and recognition of child’s special needs</td>
<td>• Must adapt to new technologies, cultures and students with a variety of needs and interests</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Takes time to adapt to feelings such as denial, fear, and anxiety</td>
<td>• Must balance many interests in the classroom and must use their professional judgment to ensure that all children in the classroom receive an appropriate education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Difficulty matching their desires for the future of their child with that child’s special needs</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Parents and Professionals

- Take time to be with each other and to listen carefully
- Treat each other as integral parts of the planning and decision making team
- Trust each other’s judgment by allowing each person to express opinions and give suggestions
- Approach disagreements in a manner that encourages mutual problem solving
- Encourage a second opinion when there is unresolved disagreement or when there is no answer to a difficult situation
Examples of some behaviours that interfere with consultation meetings.

Solutions to Help With Communication:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>BEHAVIOUR</th>
<th>SOLUTIONS</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Feels intimidated</td>
<td>Recognition of equal partnership by providing information ahead of meeting time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distrust</td>
<td>Recognition of family and systematic barriers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Display of anger</td>
<td>Understanding the other’s position - allowing time to listen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confusion</td>
<td>Making sure all parties are equally aware of the facts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Over anxious to please</td>
<td>Consideration of abilities to follow through with decisions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Complaints about others or systemic barriers</td>
<td>Give recognition when on target</td>
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Examples of some behaviours that interfere with consultation meetings.

**Solutions to Help With Communication – (Cont’d):**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>BEHAVIOUR</th>
<th>SOLUTION</th>
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<tr>
<td>Hypersensitive</td>
<td>Make allowance for personal styles.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Show empathy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fear of unknown</td>
<td>Arrange for time to gather information to help with decision making</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seldom contributes in discussion</td>
<td>Encourage person to give opinion in a more comfortable environment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ignores contributions in discussions</td>
<td>Encourage person to give opinion in a more comfortable environment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Differences of opinion about expectations of</td>
<td>Provide information about meeting content and outcome that identify</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>outcome of meeting</td>
<td>time limits</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Understanding Conflict

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factors Contributing to Conflict</th>
<th>Possible Solutions</th>
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| Insufficient, wrong, or misunderstood information: Conflicts can arise when people have too little or incorrect information or when they misunderstand the information supplied | • providing complete and/or accurate information  
• Identifying what has been misunderstood and providing clarification |
| Miscommunication: Differences in communication styles may lead the parties to misinterpret the intentions, perceptions, or attitudes of another. As well, the parties may not be aware of the way they come across and the impression they are making | • listening actively, asking questions to identify and understand assumptions that may need to be corrected, and validating the feelings of others  
• Expressing how one feels and demonstrating empathy |

*Source: Shared Solutions, Ministry of Education*
### Understanding Conflict (Cont’d)

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<td>Differing values: Differing values may mean that the parties have differing and possibly incompatible goals</td>
<td>• identifying and respecting others core values while showing and seeking flexibility in areas where compromise is possible</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concerns about resource allocation: Resources may be perceived as inadequate</td>
<td>• brainstorming ways of using existing resources more creatively and/or effectively</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Historical factors: There may be a history of disagreements and/or real or perceived injustices based on the parties’ past experiences</td>
<td>• Keeping an open mind and showing patience and willingness to listen and work to re-establish trust</td>
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<td>Structural factors: structures exist for parents, schools, and school boards over which they may have little control. This may limit the range of possible solutions for one or more parties</td>
<td>• showing empathy for frustrations, providing help with negotiating procedural obstacles, and being flexible (e.g., scheduling meetings at times that are convenient for parents, wherever possible)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal/emotional factors: The need for attention, autonomy, control, power, or recognition may influence the behaviour of one or more parties</td>
<td>• Identifying the possible needs of participants and attempting to respond to them in appropriate ways while serving the student’s best interests</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interpersonal factors: Differences in the way the parties approach conflict resolution may lead to a loss of trust. Cultural differences may cause one or more parties to feel that their point of view is not fully understood</td>
<td>• Validating the feelings and perspective of others • Expressing how one feels and demonstrating empathy • Acknowledging and respecting differences and seeking common ground</td>
</tr>
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*Source: Shared Solutions, Ministry of Education*
Communication is the Key

It is not *what* you say

It’s *how* you say it
Shared Solutions on the Go

Tips for reaching a shared solution:
1. Listen actively and intently.
2. Acknowledge the other party’s position.
3. Apologize the validity of the other party’s feelings.
4. Apologize if it seems appropriate to do so.
5. Use humor.
6. Change the timing on the meeting or take a break.
7. Use “Yes...and” instead of “Yes...but”.
8. Ask questions.
9. Change language from “you” to “us”.
10. Agree on a shared, manually acceptable solution.

Source: Shared Solutions, Ministry of Education
Shared Solutions on the Go

Key questions to help involve the student:

1. What is the problem?
2. Who is involved in the problem?
3. Who needs to be involved in the problem?
4. How do you feel about the problem?
5. What do you think can be done to resolve the problem?
6. What part could you play in resolving the problem?
7. How will we know if the problem has been resolved?
8. Who can you talk to if you need or want to share or clarify your thoughts and feelings about the problem?

Source: Shared Solutions, Ministry of Education
Problem Solving Model

Mnemonic Device
Problem Statement
Real Issue
Options
Best Choice
List Steps
Execute Plan
Measure Your Success

York Region Board of Education
Curriculum Document
Finding a Common Ground

This approach requires each party to:

- focus on the student’s strengths and needs;
- discuss and explain the assumptions or beliefs that define the problem for him or her;
- have a clear understanding of what the issue is;
- clearly articulate how he or she sees the issue;
- share all information that pertains to the issue;
- listen actively and ask open-ended questions to elicit more information, such as “What would happen if...?”, “Would you be happy if...?;
- be willing to brainstorm to identify possible options;
- be willing to identify interests, perceptions, or needs that are common to the parties;
- be willing to compromise in order to narrow the scope of the issue;
- recognize and accept common ground when it is discovered;
- agree to a written plan to implement the agreed-upon solution;
- agree to attend a follow-up meeting within a set time frame to discuss how well the solution is working.

Source: Shared Solutions, Ministry of Education
# Conflict Resolution Do’s and Don’ts

**Do**
- Look for solutions
- Focus on the problem
- Take a non-adversarial approach
- Use dialogue
- Focus on the student’s interests
- Think that “everyone can win”
- Focus on change

**Do Not**
- Look for someone to blame
- Focus on the person
- Take an adversarial approach
- Engage in debate
- Focus on a predetermined outcome
- Think that “someone has to lose”
- Focus on control
Effective Parent-Teacher Partnerships

A wonderful first step in building this relationship is the parent-teacher conference. Such a meeting, held at the beginning of the school semester, can enable parents and teachers to overview hopes and expectations for the academic year and overcome potential barriers to communication.

Equally important is to create a plan for regular and ongoing contact that will ensure that concerns are addressed before they turn into problems.
Effective Parent-Teacher Partnerships (Cont’d)

1. Establish a relationship of mutual respect and appreciation.
2. Agree on a “best time” to meet or speak; or choose to communicate in writing.
3. Teachers can help parents become active partners in supporting learning by sharing information about class routines.
4. Parents should inform teachers about possible factors at home that either pose obstacles to learning or that might enhance the teacher’s effectiveness in the classroom.
5. Teachers should inform parents about rules and regulations for the classroom as well as the school community.

6. Teachers should provide parents with an overview of content area instruction and teaching style. Parents should seek information about classroom routines.

7. Parents should provide information to teachers about past positive (and negative) school experiences.

8. Just as students are unique learners, parents and teachers have unique characteristics and styles of working with children.

9. Parents and teachers should remind each other that one way to promote success in school is to ensure that students feel “special” about their learning.
The Meeting will be a Successful if

Parents and Educators:

• Focus on the best interests of the student
• Understand each other’s perceptions of the student’s strengths and needs
• Commit the time and energy required to achieve an understanding of each other’s perceptions and seeking clarification
• Determine the ways in which they can share responsibilities (i.e. the curriculum plan for the student)
• Openly express appreciation for participation in the conference
The Meeting will be a Successful if

Parents and Educators – (Cont’d):

• Focus on determining a positive course of action rather than on assigning blame
• Share information with the student with the intent of encouraging self-understanding and motivating growth
• Carry out responsibilities as determined by the action plan
• Monitor the progress of the action plan
• Use this information as the basis for the next parent-teacher conference
The Meeting will be a Successful if

Parents and Educators – (Cont’d):

- Carefully prepare the physical and technical details in advance
- Be knowledgeable about the educational history of the student
- Have accumulated all data relevant to the issues to be addressed
- Have notified participants of timing, location, and purpose
- Ensure that all members present have been introduced
- Begin the conference with a positive comment about the student
- Describe the student’s achievements in positive and descriptive terms
- Concentrate on 1 or 2 issues of concern/interest
The Meeting will be a Successful if Parents and Educators – (Cont’d):

- Share details of steps that have been taken related to the identified issue, including student response
- Avoid the use of jargon or technical terms
- Be accepting of and responsive to parental input
- Keep a record of the action plan, documenting responsibilities
- Recognize and be prepared to empathetically respond to the variety of reactions parents may experience
- Present a variety of educational suggestions and options for consideration
- Clarify roles, responsibilities and processes for accessing support services
The Meeting will be Successful if Parents:

- Are knowledgeable about the student’s perceptions of his/her strengths and needs
- Have accumulated data relevant to the issue to be discussed
- Actively listen to the educator’s perceptions of the student
- Discuss home issues which may be relevant to student behavior
The Meeting will be Successful if

Parents – (Cont’d):

- Contribute information which will validate or clarify the educator’s perceptions of the student
- Share in the problem-solving process of evaluating strategies tried and future planning
- Ask questions which are open, not critical, and honest
- Share information about the overall strengths and needs of the student as viewed outside of the educational setting
- Share information about hobbies and interests which motivate the student
Questions During School Interviews

1. What is my child learning?
2. How will my child learn it?
3. How will you (teacher) know he has learned it?
4. How will I (parent) know he has learned it?
5. How will (the child) know he has learned it?
Ten Steps for Effective Consultation

1. Focus on the problem, not the people
2. Focus on “why I want” not “what I want”
3. Generate a variety of solutions
4. Agree upon objective criteria
5. Seek to understand the other person’s world
Ten Steps for Effective Consultation (Cont’d)

6. Listen actively
7. Level with the other person about:
   • What are you feeling?
   • What you would like to see happen?
   • What are you willing to do?
8. Grant weight to the other person by indicating that it is not important for you to know
9. Build on strengths: make weaknesses irrelevant
10. Turn intentions into actions
Effective Advocacy

What is Advocacy?
“Advocacy” can be understood as involvement in the life of another

What is the Purpose of Advocacy?
To assist in securing the rights of one’s self or another
Effective Advocacy

The 3 Types of Advocacy:
1. Individual Advocacy
2. Self-Advocacy (for yourself)
3. Systemic Advocacy
   a) Non-legislative advocacy
   b) Political lobbying

Tips:
- Educate Yourself – Knowledge is Power!
Track System for Advocacy

A method that might effectively assist you to advocate for your child or for yourself:

Think: What is the purpose of the meeting?

Review: Questions you want answered (list them before you go):

__________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________

Actively participate in discussion

Were you asked for opinions? Yes___ No___
Did you offer your opinions? Yes___ No___
Did you offer your information? Yes___ No___
Did you ask questions? Yes___ No___

Clarify terms of procedures

Did you ask for clarification? Yes___ No___

Know the outcome of the discussion. What was decided? (Describe the outcome)

__________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________

Did you ask for a summary? Yes___ No___

Adapted by Lynn Ziraldo, 1988, from “Way to Go”, University Park Press, Baltimore, Maryland.
Example of an Advocacy Model

- STOP
- THINK
- ACT
- CHECK IT OUT
"I know I'm your little angel, Mom, but to Mrs. Purdom I'm this whole other persona."
“The greatest problem of communication is...
The illusion that it has been achieved.”

- Author, Unknown
Building Blocks: Effective Parent-School Communication Strategies:

- Listen
- Empathize
- Set up a regular communication link
- Share information and knowledge
- Avoid jargon
- Question
- Ask for suggestions
- Respond to suggestions
- Time paced
- Develop a plan of action
- Set up a procedure for follow up
- Variety of methods for communication
- Two way street
Keep the focus on the child’s best interests

Emphasize what’s right rather than who’s right

Begin with areas of agreement among participants and work from there
The Power of One

I AM ONLY ONE,
BUT STILL I AM ONE.
I CANNOT DO EVERYTHING,
BUT STILL I CAN DO SOMETHING;
AND BECAUSE I CANNOT DO EVERYTHING
I WILL NOT REFUSE TO DO
THE SOMETHING THAT I CAN DO