



Suggestions for Delivering Sensitive Information to Parents

Parent conferences and IEP meetings can be stressful. The following suggestions will aid in keeping the tone of meetings friendly and in creating a safe environment. This focus will help maximize the productivity of time spent together.

1. Provide a quiet, comfortable setting. Privacy affords the opportunity for a parent to react according to his or her needs.
2. Tell both parents together, if possible. When one parent has to tell the other, misunderstanding and confusion can result.
3. Be aware of the parent's level of readiness to receive information.
4. Be sensitive to problems of conflicting information. Probe for feedback regarding any misunderstandings.
5. Good communication skills are essential. Choose clear, direct, accurate statements.
6. Keep in mind that, while a parent is hearing sensitive information, he or she may recall more about the professional's attitude than the factual information being shared. Be aware of the nonverbal cues you send.
7. Try to have a sense of what the information may mean to the parent.
8. Keep the information simple and basic without patronizing the parent. Avoid the use of jargon whenever possible.
9. Allow sufficient time for the information to be shared and for questions and discussion. Do not rush the conference.
10. Never be afraid to say "I don't know" when difficult questions arise but also indicate that you will try to find the answer or more information.
11. Realize that the parent will need time to consider the information. Be prepared to set up another conference. Follow-up is critical, as the parent may not process all the information given to him or her.

12. Do not argue with denial. Denial may be part of the process that leads to acceptance. Respect the parent's reactions even though you may not agree with them.
13. Try to be honest and straightforward without being brutal. Be wary of making predictions. Emphasize the student's strengths.
14. Be aware of one's own need for power and control in the conference or situation.
15. Present a balanced perspective. Discuss positive outcomes as well as limitations.