

Setting the tone for
successful parent meetings



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Preparing for a positive outcome



Conveying messages to parents about the outcomes of therapy services, as well recommendations regarding future services, are important responsibilities for SLPs, OTs, PTs and teachers. The tone of the meeting and method of delivering the message often shape parents' attitudes and responses. If everything goes well, the team and parents feel that they are partnering on decisions. If things don't go so well, an adversarial relationship evolves.

Success starts by recognizing that parents are eager to learn about the skills their child has acquired this school year. They also can contribute a lot to understanding the child's capabilities and future needs. Parents are nervous about meeting with educators because they may not want to hear bad news or disagree with the recommendations. Many parents bring fears, lack of confidence, or their own negative experiences to the table.

Planning and preparing for meetings with parents can lead to positive relationships and a greater sense of success for both parents and educators. Here are some tips for successfully managing IEP meetings and parent conferences. An expanded explanation of each tip follows.

Take the right steps.

- Plan and prepare ahead of time
- Set the tone for the meeting in the invitation
- Develop a reasonable meeting agenda
- Create a pleasant meeting atmosphere
- Start off on the right foot
- Foster interactive dialogue versus "talking heads"
- End on a positive note
- Follow up

Getting started

Educators and administrators must follow specific policies and procedures for IEP meetings and parent conferences. When parents and educators differ in their opinion of what is best for a child, adversarial relationships may evolve. There are little things that we can do to create a positive tone for parent meetings, and in turn help parents feel as though they are a valued member of the team. Ultimately, this will help parents and educators accomplish their primary goal: to provide the best education possible for students.

Plan and prepare ahead of time

- Confirm the meeting date/time with other participants
- Determine two to three key goals to be accomplished
- Gather support information and prepare copies
- Prepare a portfolio of the student's work that represents successes and challenges

Set the tone for the meeting in the invitation

- Let parents know the purpose of the meeting and what to expect
- State the purpose, time and location of the meeting
- Encourage parents to come with a list of questions and ideas
- Make sure directions for getting into the building and to the meeting room are clear

Develop a reasonable meeting agenda

- Outline the topics to be discussed
- Determine a guideline for amount of time to spend on each topic
- List the names of the participants
- Allow time for discussion and questions after each major topic rather than waiting until the end for questions
- Give parents time to process the discussion and formulate meaningful questions

Create a pleasant meeting atmosphere

- Make sure the meeting environment looks professional and organized
- Meet around an adult-sized table versus across the teacher's desk
- Provide parents with the agenda, paper for notes, and a pen
- Ensure that distractions are minimized (noise, interruptions)
- Sit next to parents instead of across from them to encourage equal participation and limit the sense of "us vs. them."

Start off on the right foot

- Welcome and introduce the parent(s) to each participant
- Offer the parents a beverage and a place to put their belongings
- Make name tags if the group is large
- Briefly explain the purpose of the meeting
- Give the parents five minutes to talk about their goals and to state a few topics they'd like to discuss
- Begin by discussing positive experiences and stories
- Foster interactive dialogue vs. "talking heads"
- Invite, and value, contributions from parents throughout the meeting
- Share positive examples and stories in addition to any difficult news
- Actively listen to the parent, communicating that you are interested in their perspective
- Have each educator re-introduce their name and briefly explain the focus of their services, discussing findings and recommendations
- Present facts and share concrete examples of the student's work
- Check frequently to be sure that everyone is "on the same page" and understands the information presented
- Watch the parents' body language and provide clarification if they seem confused or overwhelmed
- Avoid asking, "Do you have any questions?" Instead, ask parents specific questions about the information being presented, e.g., "Can you describe how he demonstrates that skill at home?"



End on a positive note

- Designate one person to summarize highlights of the meeting
- Re-state your recommendations
- Provide suggestions of simple ways parents can help their child at home
- Outline next steps

Follow-up

- Send parents anything that was promised during the meeting
- Check with the parents to see if any questions came up after the conference ended
- Provide an avenue for communication to parents either email, phone or interoffice mail location

Let's talk it out.

Mediscan is here to help you every step of the way. So, if there's anything we didn't cover here in this literature... simply reach out to us and tell us what you want to know. We'll do our best to answer any question you have or help resolve any obstacle you're facing.

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