

Effective Communication Tips

1. **Active listening**— The average listener does not actively listen. Instead of listening to the speaker, most listeners use the “listening time” to think of a response to the speaker’s statement. In active listening, a listener first must listen to the speaker and then summarize in their own words what the speaker said to them. The speaker then tells the listener if the summary was accurate and complete. This technique is not used for every statement; however it is used to help clarify important facts, issues and needs.
2. **Focus on the facts and be specific**— Skilled advocates use relevant facts to demonstrate that there is support for their perspective by providing specific concrete examples to illustrate your point of view.
3. **Focus on the problem not the person**— Try to keep the focus on the problems or issues at hand rather than on assigning blame or finding fault with each other.
4. **Speak from your own perspective**— Describe your own values, thoughts, feelings, etc... instead of putting words in the other person’s mouth; “I feel... I believe... I think...” instead of “You broke our agreement”. Avoid both telling the other person what you think his or her intentions are; “You’re deliberately hiding information...” and describing the other person’s personality; “You are just a...”. Instead, talk about how you are affected by the person’s behavior and choices.
5. **Build for the future**— Talk about what you want to see happen in the future rather than arguing about what has happened in the past.
6. **Focus on common interests, not positions**— A position is a solution to a problem often stated as a fixed demand. Interests are a person’s underlying values, concerns, needs, fears. Most people assume that because the other side’s positions are opposed to ours that their interests are as well. When in fact some of the interest are the same. Look for and point out these similar interests, values, concerns. Then try to frame your own position in a way that highlights their advantages for everyone concerned.
7. **Watch your nonverbal communication**— **Only about 7% of communication is verbal.** Most communication is conveyed through posture, facial expressions, gestures, eye contact, tone, reflection, and even the speed of your speech. Being mindful of your pitch and tone and body language will make the person you are speaking with feel at ease and as if they are being heard.
8. **Be organized**— Make a checklist of your concerns or areas of discussion. Have documentation readily available.
9. **Be proactive**— Address your concerns to the school and teachers early. Do not wait until the annual IEP meeting to discuss the issues that occurred during the school year. Address them as they arise.
10. **Try to find some positives**- We often focus on what is not working and forget to mention what is working. Remind the school and teacher what is going well and if you are inclined thank them for the work they are doing.