

Communicating with Families: Tips for Paraprofessionals



This tip sheet is designed to assist paraprofessionals or other uncertified school staff, who may have responsibility for communicating with caregivers.

School staff are often responsible for communicating with caregivers in informal ways (e.g., phone calls, texts, emails, and other communications outside of formal IEP meetings).

This may occur when staff are helping students transition into/out of school if caregivers or parents are transporting their child to/from school (rather than bus transportation). This is often an opportunity to exchange relevant information about the student. There may be other opportunities to exchange information informally throughout the day as well (e.g., a caregiver attends a school event, a caregiver drops off materials, etc.)

It is important that all communications are professional and accurate so that caregivers have an accurate understanding of their child's day and school staff understand how events at home may be impacting the school day.

TIPS

1. KEEP IT PROFESSIONAL

- Communicate directly. Time may be limited so prioritize communicating the most important information.
- Communicate with kindness. Do your best to maintain a polite response, regardless of caregiver behavior.
- In some schools, staff may know parents personally from community activities or other relationships. It's important to ensure that personal relationships do not lead to preferential treatment for students/caregivers, or different communication patterns.
- If relationships are tense between school staff and caregivers, it can create tension around information that's communicated. Ensure accuracy in what's communicated and try to avoid responding. In these cases, it may be best to rely on passing written information to the caregiver or asking the same questions each morning (e.g., "How did (student) sleep last night?," "Has (student) had breakfast?," etc.

2. DOCUMENT ALL COMMUNICATION

- Inquire about district policies around communication with caregivers. In some cases, it may be acceptable to text caregivers. In other situations, it may be important to stick to phone calls or written communication (e.g., email or notes).
- For communication that isn't written, make notes as soon as possible after communicating with the caregiver and document all relevant information (date, time, topics, important details). A sample communication log is included in the resources section of this tipsheet.
- For written communication, ensure that a copy is saved periodically. For example, if texting a daily update to a parent, be sure to periodically screenshot or save those texts elsewhere as text messages may disappear over time.

3. COMMUNICATE AS A TEAM

- Ensure that all team members are aware of the best way to communicate with the caregiver (e.g., texts, calls, emails)
- When possible, designate a team member as the primary point of contact with a backup if that person is absent/unavailable.
- If one team member is communicating for multiple team members (e.g., an older student who changes classes and may have multiple teachers/staff throughout the day), set up a method for ensuring that the primary communicator has all relevant information.
- Avoid communicating negative information about other team members.

TIPS

4. KNOW YOUR LIMITS

- If you're not sure about a topic, direct the caregiver or parent to the teacher or an administrator who can help.
- It is always better to ask for help rather than communicating incorrect information.

POTENTIAL ISSUES

1. CAREGIVERS REPORT INACCURATE INFORMATION WAS COMMUNICATED

- Refer to the communication log to see what was communicated.
- Determine what led to the miscommunication.
- Take steps to prevent future miscommunication.

2. STAFF FEEL THAT CAREGIVER BEHAVIOR/RESPONSES ARE INAPPROPRIATE

- Assign two team members to transfer student to/from caregiver if communication challenges are in person.
- For written communication, ensure that administrators are aware of concern and seek additional support.

RESOURCES

- Sample communication log
- Home-School Collaboration to Support Student Behavior Tip Sheet: <https://bit.ly/46CZK0i>

SAMPLE COMMUNICATION LOG

Date	Time	Staff Member	Caregiver	Format	Key Points
				<input type="checkbox"/> Phone call <input type="checkbox"/> Text message <input type="checkbox"/> Conversation <input type="checkbox"/> Other	
				<input type="checkbox"/> Phone call <input type="checkbox"/> Text message <input type="checkbox"/> Conversation <input type="checkbox"/> Other	
				<input type="checkbox"/> Phone call <input type="checkbox"/> Text message <input type="checkbox"/> Conversation <input type="checkbox"/> Other	
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