

## **Tips for Successful Interaction with School Personnel**

### *Courtesy of Ohio Parent Mentors*

Many parents feel intimidated when talking with education professionals. There is much in our society which encourages us to look up to professionals and to accept what they say without question. But you do not have to let yourself be intimidated. The discussion is about your child. You have spent far more time with your child than any school employee and you know your child better than anyone else. Your observations and intuition about your child is important and you have the right to help design his/her educational program.

Each time you have contact with school personnel, remind yourself that you are important and have a right to be a member of your child's team.

Prepare for meetings. Make a list of the important points you want to make and take it with you.

If possible, take someone with you to take notes, provide moral support or to be an extra pair of ears.

When you do not understand something, ask for clarification.

Remember to keep the discussion on the present. It is not fair to ask a team today to address grievances from years past.

At meetings, let your nonverbal behavior tell others you belong on the team. Examples: look at people when you talk to them, take notes, sit at the table with other participants, not back in your chair like an observer.

Learn to communicate assertively, rather than passively or aggressively.

- An assertive person clearly states their point of view and takes into account what others have to say. Other people generally respect an assertive person.

- A passive person discounts their own needs and defers to the other person. People learn that they can take advantage of a passive person.
- An aggressive person discounts others and insists on what she/he wants. Others may feel forced to do what the aggressive person wants, but they often feel angry or resentful about doing it and will do only as much as they have to. The aggressive person teaches others to fear and avoid her/him.

It is important to stand up for your rights and those of your child. It is also often necessary to compromise. For most people, deciding what to do is difficult. It will help to think carefully about your priorities for your child. Of all the things that you want, which are most important? What are you willing to negotiate about?

If you say some of what you wanted to say, but not all of it, don't be hard on yourself. Like other skills, assertive communication develops with practice. Congratulate yourself on taking the first steps.

When you have a complaint, discuss it first with the person directly involved. If that doesn't resolve the issue, then go to someone higher up. You will help your own credibility by giving the person involved a chance to make changes before going to a supervisor.

It is important to try not to get too worked up emotionally. The professional educators want to help your child and your involvement is very important.

Remember: let the school hear from you when you are pleased with what they are doing, not just when you have a problem or complaint. We all appreciate positive feedback, and it can create a "reservoir of good will" to help you if a problem arises.