

Tips for Partnering with Your Child's School

Build Relationships

- Build relationships before any issues come up; start the school year by introducing yourself to the principal, front office staff, teacher, counselor, paraeducator, etc.
- Help staff get to know your child.

Stay connected

- Stay informed and communicate early & often. What is the best way to connect (email, phone)? When (time of day, days of the week)?

Start with reflection

- Reflect on what you/your child needs
- Who is the decision maker on this issue? If you're not sure, it's always best to start with your child's teacher.
- What type of conversation is it? Immediate: urgent (safety), or long-term change?

Prepare for and practice speaking up

- Brainstorm several questions and choose the ones that will help you get to the heart of the issue.
- Write your question or concern and share what outcome or support you need.
- Be sure to introduce yourself and your relationship.
- Use the sandwich method: start with a positive observation or comment before digging into your core concern, e.g., "Jenny has enjoyed the read-alouds in class."
- I statements, e.g., "I am concerned about her recent frustration with reading."
- Share a story or specific example of something you have been noticing.
- Make a clear request, e.g., "I would like to talk about ways we can help her feel more engaged at school and supported at home."

Tap into your best thinking

- It is normal to be nervous, and when our emotions get the best of us, we aren't able to access the creative problem-solving portions of our brain. Tips for regulating your emotions include taking a few slow, deep breaths, drinking water or tea, or taking a short break and stepping outside for fresh air, if needed.
- Assume good intent; most people work in schools because they care about kids.
- Bring another adult with you to the meeting if you want emotional support, someone with unique information on your child, another set of ears, or if you anticipate a difficult conversation and would like another perspective.

Track your efforts

- Share your questions ahead of time in an email. Follow up with an email thanking them for their time and restate your concern, request, and/or what was agreed to..

Keep going

- Be prepared to keep asking for what the child needs, sometimes more than once. Check back in if you do not hear from the school within 1-2 weeks, offering the best times to contact you and share your phone/email for them to respond.

On The Day Of The Meeting

Gather the materials you might need. This could be your notes, water, pen, and paper.

Take a few minutes to calm your mind. It's normal to be nervous before sharing. You can have a friend with you for support, and remember that your voice can be a powerful way for important issues to come forward.

After the Meeting

Make sure there is a written record of the conversation. Sometimes the school will follow up with a formal document, such as a 504 plan. Whether there's a formal plan or not, it is often helpful to recap the conversation and what was agreed to in an email like, "Thank you for meeting. I wanted to make sure I understand the plan going forward... you will... I will... did I get that right?"

Consider if you need to approach another decision maker. It is always best to approach the teacher first, but if a policy change is needed, it may be the principal, the school board, or even state decision makers who need to take action.

